

# Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

## **You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and do not bear sin because of him. (19:17)**

He who has the opportunity to rebuke a sinner and does not will bear part of the guilt for his sin. This is explained at length in the verses of Yechezkel. G-d commanded the prophet to rebuke the people, and gave him the following guidelines: "If I command you to warn a wicked man to repent, and you do not warn him, and he dies as punishment for his sins, I will blame you for his death. But if you do warn him, even if he does not repent, you have saved your own soul. If you fail to warn a righteous man and he becomes wicked and dies as punishment, I will blame you for his death. But if you do warn the righteous man, and he does not sin, but lives, you have saved your own soul" (Yechezkel 3:17-21; the language is hard and this translation is not exact).

The Minchas Elazar asked: In the second case in which the righteous man accepts the warning and does not sin, why does it say "you have saved your own soul"? The prophet has saved the righteous man as well! He answered that sometimes the righteous man accepts the warning, but he has advisers and followers who do not understand his ways, and they will talk him out of hearkening to the rebuke of the prophet. Although the righteous man is not completely at fault and so is not considered to have sinned, he is not completely innocent either. Therefore it says in this case as well, "You have saved your own soul." (Tikun Olam, Chapter 19)

Shlomo Hamelech writes in the book of Mishlei (28:4), "Those who leave the Torah will praise the wicked man and those who keep the Torah will fight with them." Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev, in his work Ohr Haemes (p. 59), writes that his great teacher, Rabbi Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezeritch, asked two questions on this verse: Those who leave the Torah are wicked, and those who keep the Torah are righteous. So it should have been written simply: "The wicked praise the wicked, and the righteous fight with them." Furthermore, the first half of the verse says "wicked man" in the singular, but the second half says "fight

with them" in the plural. Why does it switch from the singular to the plural?

The Maggid explained that there are two kinds of righteous people. There are some righteous people who study Torah and practice kindness, but do not rebuke others who are doing wrong. Although it is a mitzvah in the Torah to do so – "you shall surely rebuke your neighbor" – these people are of such soft and good character that they are incapable of telling another person his faults. There are other righteous people who stand up in public and fight with the evildoers, rebuking and berating them constantly, as it states (Tehillim 139:21), "I quarrel with those who rise up against You." The evildoers hate this second group of righteous people, because they say, "The first group of righteous people are also righteous, and yet they are silent about us, so we must not be so bad. So why do you fight with us?" The second group of righteous people, seeing how the first group has indirectly caused them to be hated, begins to rebuke the first group of righteous people, saying, "Why do you keep silent?"

That is what Shlomo Hamelech meant: "Those who leave the Torah" means the first group of righteous people, who do not rebuke the wicked, but instead try to find redeeming qualities in them. They "praise the wicked." Because of this, "those who keep the Torah," i.e. the second group of righteous people, "fight with them" – with the first group of righteous people.

These words were written by none other than Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev, who is so famous for his prayers in which he argued valiantly in defense of the Jewish people and was able to find something good to say about anyone. Indeed this was how he spoke to G-d, but when speaking to the Jewish people he and other righteous men rebuked the wicked and condemned them in the strongest of terms. (Vayael Moshe 1:178)

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